

Christians Grow Old

The elderly Christian within the family and the church:
A biblical study

David Gay writes:

In recent years there has been a healthy emphasis by Christians on the biblical concept of the family. A welcome concern has been shown in this important matter. The upbringing of children and the responsibilities of Christian parents have received much attention. All this is good. However I feel that one aspect, at least, of this matter of the family has been rather neglected. It is this that I wish to examine, albeit briefly, in this booklet. I refer to the subject of old age. I wish to write a few words on the teaching of the Bible, not concerning young people for once, but concerning the elderly. The Bible is not silent on the special problems and opportunities of old age. God draws our attention to the matter in his word, first by recording for us the experiences of the aged, and secondly by direct instruction on the subject. Just as the gospel can be adorned by the spiritual and faithful upbringing of children in the fear, nurture and admonition of God, so it can be adorned by a spiritual and dignified attitude to old age. Likewise, just as a worldly attitude in the relationship between parents and their children can so easily (and so frequently) mar the testimony of the gospel, so it is possible to harm the gospel profession in old age, by unbiblical attitudes.

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Christians Grow Old

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Note to the Reader

It is some thirty years since this little book was published, and it has long been out of print. Despite its smallness – perhaps because of its smallness – I have reason to believe that in its day it proved a blessing to some. And, to my amazement – and delight – it was even translated into Italian! Because of this, and having enjoyed the benefits of internet publishing, I have for some time wanted to re-issue the work to make it available to a wider public. Indeed, I had made a preliminary start, when my good American friends, Joe and Carla Sheetz, gave me two or three copies, with the obvious implication that they would like to see it back in print. I decided to satisfy their wishes.

As I say, this material was first published thirty years ago. Re-reading it for this present publication, I have to confess my acute embarrassment: it is far easier to write about the Christian in old age when you in your 40s than it is live as a believer when you are in your 70s! Furthermore, I am conscious of James' warning:

My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment. For we all stumble in many things. If anyone does not stumble in word, he is a perfect man (James 3:1-2).

Despite these serious considerations, I have decided to re-publish the booklet as it stands – simply eliminating some typographical and grammatical blemishes, and concluding (and here opening) with Christ's words: 'If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them' (John 13:17) – desiring that, warts and all, it may live again and do good to many more. Above all, as with all my work, I hope that this little effort will bring glory to God.

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I

The Spiritual Condition Is the Most Important Concern for the Aged

The first matter that the elderly person must be clear on is his spiritual state. There are two sorts of men. Two sorts only: converted and unconverted. Old people are no exception to this. Merely to be old is no sign of spirituality: 'The sinner being an hundred years old shall be accursed' (Isaiah 65:20).

The first question that every aged person has to ask himself, is the same question that all men need to ask and to answer, irrespective of age: 'Am I a real Christian?' All that follows in this booklet by way of consolation, comfort and hope for the aged person is entirely reserved for the Christian. How can an elderly person be sure about this matter? 'How can I know that I am a real Christian?'

The first thing is to realise that this is a question that does demand our attention. God commands us to make sure: 'Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; prove yourselves' (2 Corinthians 13:5). The Bible gives us the marks and evidences by which to test ourselves. The elderly person, in common with all men, must look into his life to see if he has these signs, these evidences and marks of grace.

Jesus said: 'Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God'. Nicodemus could not understand this. 'How can a man be born when he is old?' he asked. Jesus went on: 'Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit, do not marvel that I said to you: "You must be born again"' (John 3:3-7).

Every man needs to be born again, regenerated, born of God's Spirit. Until that new birth, he is dead in his sins and he will never enter the kingdom of God. And that is why every aged person must make sure of his spiritual state. That is why this matter is an absolute priority.

What are the evidences of the new birth? Well, when a child is born, there are unmistakable signs of physical life. Similarly, when someone is born again, there are unmistakable signs of spiritual life. What are they? The man who has been born again will 'receive' Christ, he will exercise saving faith in him (John 1:12-13; Acts 16:29-31). He will repent of his sins (Acts 2:37-38; Psalm 51:1-12). He will receive the message of the Bible (Acts 16:14). He will seek to press on in the knowledge of Christ (Philippians 3:12-15). He will seek to live in a holy way, in obedience to God and for his glory (Psalm 119:127-128; John 14:15,23-24). Such are some of the evidences of God's work within. It is most important – vital – to note that these are the evidences, not the causes of regeneration.

The question every elderly person must ask is: 'Do I have these evidences? Do I really trust Christ, and Christ alone for my salvation? Do I turn away from my sin and turn unto God? Do I seek to honour the Lord in all that I do? Do I strive to live to his praise and glory? In short, am I a real Christian?' If the answer is: 'No', then this is the matter that must be resolved, now, at once. Everything else that follows in this booklet is written for the comfort and instruction of the aged Christian. And only for the Christian.

Old Age Is Usually Accompanied by Physical Decline

This is the first fact that we have to recognise as we begin to examine the biblical teaching concerning advanced age and the child of God. Generally there is some physical decline in old age, even for the Christian. While there are cases of old people who seem to show no signs of their age, the general rule is that age does show itself in a physical way: 'Moses was a hundred and twenty years old when he died, yet his eyes were not dim nor his natural vigour abated' (Deuteronomy 34:7). Caleb could say: 'Here I am this day, eighty five years old! I am as strong this day as I was on the day that Moses sent me; as my strength was then, so now is my strength for war' (Joshua 14:10-11).

However these are exceptions. The usual case is that old age brings with it a corresponding physical decline. Eyesight may become weak and fail. Isaac, Jacob, Eli and Ahijah all had failing sight as a result of age (Genesis 27:1; 48:10; 1 Samuel 3:2; 4:15; 1 Kings 14:4). Another sign of old age may be a stoop (2 Chronicles 36:17, AV). The elderly person might need a stick (Zechariah 8:4). The bushy black locks of youth might give way to grey hairs (1 Samuel 12:2; Job 15:10). The sense of taste might begin to fail and hearing grow weak (2 Samuel 19:35). Such an aged person as Sarah might feel that their days of usefulness have passed them by; they are now too old (Genesis 18:11). Old people often feel the cold (1 Kings 1:1). Retirement age comes (Numbers 8:25). Strength will diminish (Psalm 71:9). Old people can feel 'full of days' or 'weighed down with years' (Jeremiah 6:11). Age shows itself in the withering of flesh; its marks are evident on the skin (Lamentations 3:4). Feebleness can accompany the passing of the years; Jesus used the fact in John 21:18.

Thus the Bible makes it very clear that old age generally brings with it a marked physical decline. The elderly cannot do what once they did. They cannot always do the things they would like to do. Memory fades. Eyes fail. It might well get more and more difficult to read and concentrate. It gets increasingly difficult to get to the meetings of the local church. Wintry weather is a problem. The need for rest and early nights can hinder attendance at evening meetings. The aged Christian might come to use the language of Psalm 42:4: 'I remember... how I used to go with the multitude... to the house of God'. And this can be a real source of sadness to the elderly Christian as it was to the Psalmist (Psalm 42:5).

There can be further grounds of loneliness for the elderly. Friends die all around; bereavements grow. Old age can bring sickness and disappointment. Once-valued possessions get destroyed, once-prized ties get broken. Jacob's anxiety at the prospect of losing another son made him cry: 'You would bring my grey hair with sorrow to the grave' (Genesis 42:38). All this can make old age a sad time, and in itself contribute to physical decline. See also Psalm 90:10. What a depressing picture all this is!

Not a bit of it! These things are not recorded in the Bible so that we might get depressed over them. Nor have I listed them for that purpose. What is the purpose of noting such things?

There are two reasons for looking at such things. First, it is to the *comfort* of the aged Christian. Secondly, it is a *challenge* to the aged Christian.

(a) The comfort of it

God has recorded these facts about old age to comfort us. A Christian growing old, and noticing the steady decline of his physical faculties, might well be tempted to think that his difficulty with reading the Bible stemmed from a decline in his spiritual desire. (Of course, it is possible for an elderly Christian to backslide; age does not bring with it immunity

from spiritual decline). But the Bible shows us that the decline as years advance may well have nothing at all to do with spiritual things. An elderly Christian's difficulty with reading might simply be a case of physical decline. And that is all. Thus the Bible record of godly men who had such a decline in their advanced years is a comfort.

Christians must learn to expect this decline and not doubt their spirituality when they see it. Satan, who is ever willing to accuse them, will try to use their difficulties in old age. He will try to rob the aged Christian of his peace and sense of assurance. God's word can and must be a source of comfort at this point. The Christian must not confuse the physical and the spiritual. A man can decline in his body, while his soul is still strong and healthy.

Again, an aged Christian might feel the loneliness of old age. He might go on to think that even God himself was absent from him now that he is old. Such a confusion would prove to be of immense harm to the soul. Once again, the biblical explanation and warning that Christians are to expect trials in their latter years is a great comfort to them. They will not be surprised at the fiery trial which might come upon them (1 Peter 4:12).

(b) The challenge of it

While the Bible faithfully records the physical decline that generally accompanies old age, it does not allow us to make that an excuse for a corresponding decline in spiritual life. In the world of nature, autumn is the time of falling leaves. But that season is, in some respects, the most glorious of the entire year. Even as the leaves are dropping off the branches, the trees are all ablaze with their vivid colours. The elderly Christian might well have grey hairs, but those grey hairs can be a glory: 'Grey hair is the splendour of the old' (Proverbs 16:31). It is only right that Christians should be comforted by the biblical knowledge that they can expect some physical decline in the old age, and that they should learn not to confuse the physical with the spiritual. Nevertheless, we must

face the challenge of the word of God on this very point. It will not do for men to take the comfort of God's word and neglect the challenge of it.

What is the challenge of God's word on this matter? The physical part of a Christian might well decline in old age. The spiritual must not. The testimony of every child of God must be: 'We do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day' (2 Corinthians 4:16). Every Christian must go on in his spiritual experience, throughout the whole of his life: 'The path of the just is like the shining sun, that shines ever brighter till the full light of day' (Proverbs 4:18). Spiritual exercises must be kept up. There is no reason for Christians to relax spiritually as they grow old. Although the body may not be able to perform what the spirit would, nevertheless, the spirit must still desire to press on with God. The Christian must still have spiritual desire, even in advanced years. Of old age it might well be said: 'The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak' (Matthew 26:41). The challenge of which I write, comes at this point.

God promises his gracious help and strength in the physical weakness of old age: 'The LORD... gives power to the weak, and to those who have no might, he increases strength... those that wait on the LORD shall renew their strength. They will mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint' (Isaiah 40:28-31). 'Seeing then that we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathise with our weaknesses, but who was in all points tempted, as we are – yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need' (Hebrews 4:14-16).

Physical weakness must not be allowed to become an excuse for spiritual decline. God's grace is specially provided to prevent such a thing. He has said: 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my strength is made perfect in weakness' (2

Corinthians 12:9). The Christian's response must be: 'Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities... in needs... in persecutions... in distresses for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then am I strong' (2 Corinthians 12:9-10). The word of God challenges Christians not to decline spiritually as they grow old. More, it challenges elderly Christians to prove God's grace even more in their advanced years. An aged Christian might well be much changed physically, compared with his youth. But God has not: 'I am the LORD, I do not change' (Malachi 3:6). God does not change like shifting shadows (James 1:17). 'Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever' (Hebrews 13:8). Trials might be intensified in old age. Physical decline, illness and loneliness might prove to be sources of intense affliction. But they are, also, a grand means to demonstrate the grace of God. The aged Christian can adorn the gospel by a life of patience, courage, cheerfulness and submission in the physical decline of old age. 'For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal' (2 Corinthians 4:17-18).

Application to an elderly Christian

Are you prepared to receive the instruction of the word of God on this matter of your decline in your old age? Are you prepared to draw the comfort God offers you in his word? Can you distinguish between the physical and the spiritual in your life? Or have you confused them and been depressed as a result? Will you face the challenge of the word of God and maintain your spiritual life? Will you go further and seek an increase of spirituality in your advanced years? Will you refuse every excuse to pamper your flesh to the harm of your soul? Do you use the language of 2 Corinthians 4:18? Do you make your physical weakness an excuse for declining

spiritual desire? Or can you truly say that your spirit is willing, still? Have you ‘switched off’, spiritually speaking? Are you coasting along? Are you using physical weakness to excuse spiritual backsliding? Or are you maintaining, even increasing, spiritual desire by the daily renewal of your inner man?

Application to a Christian of younger years

Do you realise that older Christians experience physical decline and weakness as the years pass? Do you allow for it in your dealings with aged Christians? Do you confuse their physical decline with spiritual decline? Do you realise that old age can bring special problems to the saints? Do you pray for elderly Christians? Do you visit them? Do you realise that perhaps they wish they could do more than they are able? Do you do all you can to help them maintain their spiritual walk, and even improve it, in spite of their limitations brought on by advanced years?

3

Some General Points from the Biblical Teaching on the Subject of the Aged

(a) The aged must be shown respect

When a society shows disrespect for the aged, it is a sure sign that it is under the curse of God (Deuteronomy 28:50; 2 Chronicles 36:17; Isaiah 3:5). God has linked respect for the elderly with the respect due to his name, so high a value has he placed upon it. 'You shall rise up before the grey-headed and honour the presence of an old man, and fear your God' (Leviticus 19:32). When Paul appealed to Philemon, he used his age as an argument to secure his obedience (Philemon 9). David treated the aged Barzillai with gentle consideration (2 Samuel 19:31-39). It is a Christian duty to respect the aged. It is a sin to despise parents when they get old (Proverbs 23:22). Even the heathen Pharaoh respected Jacob's age (Genesis 47:7-8).

(b) The aged must maintain a careful watch over their spiritual state

A fine testimony of a Christian can easily be marred in old age. Samuel, for example, made bad mistakes of judgement when he grew old: 'When Samuel was old he made his sons judges over Israel but his sons did not walk in his ways; they turned aside after dishonest gain, took bribes and perverted justice' (1 Samuel 8:1,3). Solomon, also, marred his testimony in his old age: 'As Solomon grew old, his wives turned his heart after other gods, and his heart was not loyal to the LORD his God, as the heart of David his father had been' (1 Kings 11:4). Wisdom should be a characteristic of the elderly but it is not always so: 'Better is a poor and wise

youth than an old and foolish king who will be admonished no more' (Ecclesiastes 4:13). There are such things as 'old wives tales' (1 Timothy 4:7). Old age is a special time of spiritual danger. Christians have to avoid foolishness, superstition and spiritual declension as they reach the end of their days. True it is that 'grey hair (is) the splendour of the old' (Proverbs 20:29) – but only 'if it be found in the way of righteousness' (Proverbs 16:31).

God has given direct instruction to his elderly people so that they might maintain their spiritual self-watch: 'The older men (must) be sober, reverent, temperate, sound in faith, in love, in patience. The older women likewise, that they be reverent in behaviour, not slanderers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things' (Titus 2:2-3). The Scripture teaches that aged Christian men must exercise a sound, balanced judgement, not clouded by alcohol. They are to avoid frivolity and instead they must cultivate a grave, serious life worthy of the respect that God demands for them. They are to be self-controlled. They must make sure that they are, indeed, true Christians, well-grounded in the faith. They must show true spiritual love and a persevering spirit. Aged Christian women, likewise, must show a dignified seriousness in their way of life. This must extend to their manner of dress and their entire bearing. They must be careful in what they say – especially avoiding gossip and silly talk. Old people, especially women, can do great harm by spreading foolish, superstitious and malicious tales. They, too, must avoid the snare of alcohol. On the positive side, they must seek to help younger Christian housewives in the practical affairs of running a home to the glory of God. They must teach them from the word of God, enforcing their instruction by their own experience.

If elderly Christians obey this teaching of the Bible they will, indeed, keep a good watch over their spiritual state in their old age.

(c) The aged must continue to hope in the promises of God

God has given great encouragements to his aged people in his word. They must continue to look for the fulfilment of those promises in their life. There are three parts to this:

First, they must trust God's promises to them as individuals.

Secondly, they must trust God's promises to the church at large.

Thirdly, they must pray for the fulfilment of the promises of God.

God has promised special grace to the aged Christian, and so an aged Christian must trust God for the fulfilment of his word. God will never forsake any of his people; no, not even when they are old and weak: 'Even to your old age I am he, and even to grey hairs I will carry you! I have made you and I will bear you: I will sustain you and I will deliver you' (Isaiah 46:4). God has promised his people spiritual prosperity-even when they are old: 'They shall still bear fruit in old age, they shall be fresh and flourishing' (Psalm 92:14). The elderly Christian should pray that God will perform his promise to him in particular. So did the Psalmist: 'Even when I am old and grey, O God, do not forsake me' (Psalm 71:18). Simeon, as he came near to death, was looking for the fulfilment of God's promise to him (Luke 2:25-35). Anna who 'was of a great age... gave thanks to the Lord and spoke of him [Jesus] to all those who looked for redemption of Jerusalem' (Luke 2:36-38). Even in her great age she was still rejoicing in God who was fulfilling his promises to his people.

The elderly must continue to exercise a strong faith in God. They must look to him that he will not only bless them but that he will prosper the church. Unbelief is a great sin at any age. The elderly are no exception. Zechariah's case is a warning of the possibility of unbelief in advanced years (Luke 1:18-20). Every Christian must aim to have the testimony of Hebrews 11:13: 'All these died in faith, not

having received the promises but having seen them afar off, they were assured of them’.

(d) The aged must still seek to be useful

Aged Christians can feel that they have little use left in them. That is all wrong. As the people of God get near to the end of their earthly life they must seek to be useful Christians still: ‘Even when I am old and grey, O God, do not forsake me’. Why did the Psalmist pray like that? Did he wish just to prove God’s gracious love for him in his time of weakness? Certainly not! Listen to him! ‘Even when I am old and grey, O God, do not forsake me, until I declare your power to this generation, your power to all that are to come’ (Psalm 71:18). He wanted to leave behind him a glorious testimony to God and his power. Look at the extent of his vision. Did he think in terms of influencing a few people, a mere handful? No. He wanted to influence ‘this generation’, and indeed, ‘all who are to come’. He certainly was not thinking that he would be useless in his last years. In some senses, perhaps, his life’s greatest work had to be accomplished then. Anna who ‘was of a great age... spoke... to all’ about Christ (Luke 2:36-38). God’s elderly still have a work to do for him. ‘They shall still bear fruit in old age, they shall be fresh and flourishing, to declare that “the LORD is upright; he is my Rock, and there is no unrighteousness in him”’ (Psalm 92:14-15).

(e) The aged must prepare for death

Aged Christians are obviously near to death and there is an inevitable fear of it. After all, it is the enemy of men. Only Christ can free men from its slavery (Hebrews 2:14-15). But it is ‘the last enemy to be destroyed’ (1 Corinthians 15:26). Christians still have to pass the way of it and it can bring fear to them. But Christ has drawn its sting and God has given wonderful promises to his people to comfort them in this, their last trial: ‘Death is swallowed up in victory. Where, O death, is your sting? Where, O grave, is your victory? The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord

Jesus Christ' (1 Corinthians 15:54-57). He still says to all his people: 'I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me, even though he dies, he shall live, and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?' (John 11:25-26). 'Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions, if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to myself; that where I am, there you may be also' (John 14:1-3). An elderly Christian should comfort his heart much by the meditation of heaven which will so soon be his home. Paul did as he neared death: 'The time of my departure is at hand. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will give me on that day, and not only to me, but also to all who have loved his appearing' (2 Timothy 4:6-8). 'For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain... I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far' (Philippians 1:21-23). An aged Christian, especially, since he is so near his entrance into heaven, should think about his approaching death and prepare for it. He may take the precious comfort of God to give him strength in his last days. God has special grace for the dying day. Joshua was 'old and advanced in years' when he gathered the people before him and spoke of God's works and how he had kept his promises. He encouraged them to go on with the LORD and warned them against disobedience: 'Now I am about to go the way of all the earth... not one thing has failed of all the good things which the Lord your God spoke concerning you', he said (Joshua 23:14). Yes, the aged Christian must prepare for death.

(f) The aged must not waste themselves in useless regrets

An elderly person might come under conviction of sin by the power of the Holy Spirit. And it might dawn upon him that he has practically wasted his life. Such a person must not waste time regretting the wasted years away from Christ. He

must get on now! He must seek the Lord while he still has the time and opportunity. It is no use sitting around grieving over what might have been. God will be found by all who seek him. Even in old age a sinner can be brought to salvation. God will hear and answer the prayer: 'Even when I am old and grey, O God, do not forsake me' (Psalm 71:18). 'You will seek the LORD your God, you will find him if you seek for him with all your heart and with all your soul. When you are in distress and all these things come upon you in the latter days, you will turn to the LORD your God and obey him' (Deuteronomy 4:29-31). 'Seek the LORD while he may be found; call upon him while he is near... let him turn to the LORD, and he will have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will freely pardon' (Isaiah 55:6-7).

But not only must an aged unconverted sinner not waste time in useless regrets, neither must an aged Christian. It is a temptation for the elderly child of God to waste his time, his precious time, in grieving over the past. There are three things involved in this regret for past failures:

(i) *It is an almost universal grief.* In some senses, it ought to be. No one, surely, has ever lived his life so as to be free of regrets? However, some of God's children are especially prone to this worry. Perhaps there have been long periods of wasted years, backsliding and drifting in spiritual experience. Such neglect, and so many missed opportunities, lie heavy on the soul. Old age can be a sorrowful time for the people of God. Wasted years bring anguish of heart.

(ii) *It is a useless grief.* The explanation of this is simple, in the extreme. What good will it do to sit grieving over the past? Spilled milk never was put back into the bottle by grieving about it. The years have been wasted, perhaps. Grieving about them will never bring back the opportunities. No aged Christian should allow the devil to gain an advantage on him by causing needless grief in this way. It is a master stroke – the devil kills two birds with one stone. He produces sorrow over the past and paralyses the Christian for the present. Thus, he is helping the aged Christian to waste

even more years! Christians should not waste their time in living in regret over the wasted years of the past. They should get on and live better lives now. They must not waste the future and the present by living in the past.

(iii) It is a grief that has an answer. God completely understands the fears of his children. He knows that they can all look back upon waste in their spiritual lives. He knows and he has done something about it. He has given a wonderful promise. What is more, he keeps it. God has promised to make up for the wasted years! ‘I will restore to you the years that the locust hath eaten’ (Joel 2:25). An aged Christian can experience a glorious spiritual reviving in his closing years. God has promised that what he can do in a physical way he can do, also, in a spiritual way: ‘At evening time, it shall happen, that it will be light’ (Zechariah 14:7).

Christians experience bereavement and sorrow. But a Christian must not ‘sorrow as others, who have no hope’ (1 Thessalonians 4:13). Christ has comfort for those who mourn about sin (Matthew 5:4). An aged Christian must guard against the danger of worldly sorrow in his loneliness. He must not waste time in useless grief. He must show to a watching world that Christ has given him the answer.

(g) The aged must realise and accept their limitations

As we have seen, increasing age brings increasing limitations. The aged Christian must recognise this and accept it. He must not try to act as though he was still in his youthful prime. He must live in a manner becoming his age and maturity (Titus 2:2-5). Also, he must allow for the fact that his decline in old age can be a source of difficulty for his family and friends, as well as for himself. An aged Christian must show a sensible, a spiritual, attitude to this. He must try to ease the difficulties his decline causes others.

The aged Barzillai had been good to king David in the past and David wished to honour him. But Barzillai knew that he would only be a burden to the king because his age prevented

him from enjoying the life-style David offered him. He declined to impose himself upon the king (2 Samuel 19:31-39). When age brings its decline, the godly must allow for it. Certain things cannot be done. Certain burdens have to be laid down. Place has to be given to younger men. 'Know thyself' is a good dictum for the aged, as well as for all others.

Abraham showed many of these aspects of true spirituality in his old age. When he was 'old and well advanced in years', he still trusted God's promises; he was still mindful of his duty and responsibilities; he still took thought for the future, his descendants, etc; he still lived an orderly, careful life in a serious manner. See Genesis 24:1-9.

Application to an elderly Christian

God demands people show respect for you. Do you live worthy of such respect? Do you live so as to commend the name of God to others? Do you live worthily in the light of Leviticus 19:32, in a conscious way? Do you watch over your soul? Are you careful and prayerful that you might maintain a strong, vital spiritual experience, right to the end of your life? Are you jealous, lest anything should mar your testimony now, at the end of your life? Do you consciously apply Titus 2:2-3? Do you rest in the promises of God? Do you pray for their fulfilment in your life? Do you pray for the prosperity of the church? Do you try to do good? Are you useful? Are you ready to die? Is your house in order, so that when the day comes you only have to die? Are you consciously resting on Christ and the promises of God as you approach death? Do you speak of Christ and recommend him to all you can?

Do you sit around grieving over the past? Do you wring your hands and your heart over what 'might have been'? Can you not see the wiles of the devil in this? Will you not trust in the plain promise of God, that he will make up for the losses? Trust in the blood of Christ to rid you of all sin and then press on. Can you not catch the vision that your best, most

spiritual and useful years may be ahead of you? Don't live in the past. Live now and think ahead. Pray that you might live to see the raising of Zion to be a praise in the earth, even yet.

Application to a Christian of younger years

Do you show the respect to the aged that you ought? Do you realise that it is not merely a social custom, a sign of 'good manners', but that it is a Christian duty? God has commanded respect for the aged, even linking it to his own name (Leviticus 19:32) – do you consciously link obedience to that command with obedience to the first three of the ten commandments? Do you seek to help aged Christians maintain their spiritual experience? Do you pray for those aged Christians you know, that they might grow in grace and in the knowledge of Christ? Do you remind them of the promises of God when you see them cast down? Do you accept their help and advice? Or do you dismiss them as old-fashioned and outdated? Do you value their spiritual maturity? Do you benefit as much as you might from them? Or as much as you ought?

What is more, if the aged should prepare for death, so should you. If you are to have no regrets when you get old, live now with that end in mind. Are you wasting your youth? Are you wasting your opportunities for spiritual growth? Remember your Creator in the days of your youth, before the days of trouble come and the years approach when you will say: 'I find no pleasure in them' (Ecclesiastes 12:1). 'Be careful, then, how you live-not as unwise but as wise, redeeming the time, [making the most of every opportunity], because the days are evil' (Ephesians 5:15-16; Colossians 4:5). Do not put off spiritual growth until tomorrow. Do not wait until you have finished this and that. Start now. If you do not want to grieve over the years that the locust has eaten, do not let spiritual locusts eat any. Clear, isn't it? But by God's grace it is possible. Pray now: 'Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom' (Psalm 90:12). 'Lord make me to know my end, and what is the measure of my days, that I

may know how frail I am' (Psalm 39:4). Live now so that you will 'dread the grave as little as your bed'. If you would have Christ say to you: 'Well done, good and faithful servant', be a good and faithful servant, now. Are you 'fighting the good fight and keeping the faith', now? What steps are you taking to ensure that you can echo the words of Paul in 2 Timothy 4:6-8?

The Elderly Christian as a Member of the Family

The world talks a great deal today about old people and its concern for them, and there are several organisations which have been set up to deal with their special needs. But I submit this is an area where the gospel of Christ can shine in a dark sinful world. The teaching of the Bible concerning the position of the elderly within the family is quite different from the views and practices of a great many people today. Never, it seems, has our society been so interested in the plight of the aged. But I submit, never has there been so much real loneliness amongst old people. Why is this? We have witnessed the steady breakdown of family life in our time. There have been many contributory factors. The rehousing programmes in many inner city areas have broken the very strong and effective family ties that once existed and thrived there. The Welfare State itself has proved a hindrance to the maintenance of the effective family unit. By its many schemes to relieve the family of its cares, it has tended to destroy the family. That which was originally intended to support has, in fact, tended to undermine. Above all, of course, the steady (headlong) turning away from the Bible has meant a corresponding turning away from biblical standards in all aspects of life. The family has not escaped. Indeed, it is a spectacular casualty. In this booklet, I wish to draw attention to one aspect of the family; namely, the position of the elderly within it. I aim to give the teaching of the Bible on this matter.

(a) The aged are still part of the family

Today, in many cases, the elderly are no longer part of the family. Oh! in name they are, but in practice they very often

are not. Many old people are relegated, by their young relations, to institutions, homes, *etc.* There they can be, and often are, effectively separated from the rest of the family. I fear it is not too hard to say that many old people are looked upon merely as nuisances to be kept away from real family life.

Let me hasten to add at this point, that I do not write against the necessary institutional care of the aged. It is a good thing, a very good thing that excellent, caring homes exist for the elderly who are in desperate need. It is a fine testimony for the gospel that homes are set up by Christians to cater for such people. It is excellent that spiritual and dignified care can be shown to the aged in this way. I would not write against such commendable effort – no, not in the least. After all, the Bible teaches us that the church must care for its aged when there is no other source of Christian care (1 Timothy 5:9,16). However, many old people in our society are separated from their families, completely unnecessarily, today. The Bible has something to say about it.

Nor is that the only area that needs examination. I submit that many old people today are made to feel different from the other members of society. Very often they are made to feel that they are not quite the same. They are given special (*i.e.* different) treatment in a great variety of ways. Concessionary fares, special tickets, varied prices, special handouts... just to mention a few, all tend to make the elderly feel that they are different. They are treated differently so they must be different. No doubt these things are well-intentioned, and I realise that I leave myself open to strong criticism for even mentioning the matter. But, I submit that this different treatment leads society to look upon old people as different from the rest of the people. I am sure that the Bible is against such a view.

The Bible teaches that the elderly must be considered a part of the family. Very much so. The Bible gives the old a very real part to play within the family.

There is a lovely illustration of this in the life of Naomi. When Ruth married Boaz and had a son, Naomi was not left out in the cold. What is more important, there is no suggestion that this might have happened. Naomi was not forgotten in all the excitement of the marriage. Nor was she ignored later, in the thrill of the birth of a son. Her friends spoke to Naomi about her young grandson in warm and loving terms: 'And may he be to you a restorer of life and a nourisher of your old age. For your daughter-in-law, who loves you... has given him birth' (Ruth 4:13-15). This is a lovely picture of the place that aged saints should have in the family of Christians. A young grandson has just been born. The elderly grandmother is taken into the celebrations, totally. Look how it is confidently expected that the young child will be a constant and continuing source of comfort to the old lady. She was so much a part of the family that the neighbours could say that the child was as good as hers: 'Naomi has a son', they said (Ruth 4:17). We must not disown this as Jewish custom. The aged Naomi was a valued and respected part of the family.

This care of the elderly within the family is a gospel principle. It is not a question of 'social ethics'. It is a question of obedience to the commands of God: 'If a widow has children or grandchildren, let them first learn to show piety at home and to repay their parents; for this is good and acceptable before God... if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for his own household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever' (1 Timothy 5:3-8). Strong words! Strong words, indeed. But they are the words of the Bible. They are in the word of God. This is the biblical doctrine on old people and the family. That is why I stand by my earlier remarks about much of modern day old people's care. I am convinced that much of the practice of care for the elderly today is contradicting the principles of the Bible, and that is why I said Christians can shine in a dark world. Christians must show real care for the aged. They must treat them as members of the family. Not in name only, but also in practice.

There is another illustration of the same point in the life of Jacob. When Joseph heard that his father was ill, he took his sons to see him. He did not keep the young boys away from the deathbed of their aged grandfather. Joseph brought his young sons to his aged father who was now almost blind: 'Now the eyes of Israel were dim with age, so that he could not see. So Joseph brought his sons close to him and his father kissed them and embraced them' (Genesis 48:10). What an experience for the lads! What a tender scene! This is the kind of family care and love that the Bible speaks of. The aged are not left out. Children are not the be-all and end-all of the family. The aged and the very young are all together. Infants, parents and grandparents are all one together. The children and the nearly blind grandfather in happy loving unity. This happy 'togetherness' of the very old and the very young is so powerful a picture that God uses it to illustrate the blessing that revival will bring to his people: 'Old men and old women shall again sit in the streets of Jerusalem, each one with his staff in his hand because of great age. The streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in the streets' (Zechariah 8:4-5). I realise that there is more to that picture than the happy unity of old and young, but that lesson is an integral part of the passage. Old people are still very much part of the godly family. They are not to be left out.

(b) The aged are an honoured part of the family

The aged are not to be given a mere place in the family of the godly. They are to be given an honoured place.

The respect that God demands for the old in general, must be shown within the family in particular. The sin of despising aged parents is directly forbidden (Proverbs 23:22). By the same text, the positive command to honour an aged parent is also set out. Christians must not have a neutral attitude. The aged should hold an honoured place in godly homes: 'Parents are the pride of their children' (Proverbs 17:6). How often today children are the pride of their parents! When Joseph presented his father and his brothers to Pharaoh, he placed especial honour upon his aged father. He took him before

Pharaoh, alone. He did not hide his old father away. He was pleased (proud?) to bring him before the king. Jacob, when he lay dying, called his sons to his bedside. He said: 'Gather together and hear, you sons of Jacob; listen to your father Israel' (Genesis 49:2). It was a coveted thing in those days to receive the blessing of an aged father. So far from being neglected, the elderly were highly regarded. Isaac, when he was very old, weak and blind drew very near to death. But his sons still obeyed his commands and did all they could to obtain his blessing (Genesis 27). The aged are not to be ignored. They are to be honoured. The godly family will hold its older members in great esteem.

(c) The aged are a useful part of the family

The aged are not merely part of the family, nor are they just to be respected. The elderly have a useful part to play within the godly family. Their valuable experience and maturity have to be put to work. The use that old people can be in general, must be worked out in the family in particular. Naomi received comfort from the birth of her grandson. But she not only received; she gave, also. She took a real and practical interest in the child's care and up-bringing. She 'took the child, laid him on her bosom and became a nurse to him' (Ruth 4:16).

Jacob made himself useful in the lives of his grandsons. When Joseph came to see him when he was in bed with illness, Jacob took the opportunity to speak of God, his word, works and ways. This was such a blessing to his son and his grandsons who listened to him. What instruction for young minds! Picture the scene. Listen to the old man: 'God Almighty appeared to me... there he blessed me and said to me...'. He went on: 'Rachel died' (Genesis 48:1-7). Then he proceeded to bless the boys. With his hands upon their heads he said: 'May the God before whom my fathers... walked, the God who has been my shepherd... may he bless the boys. May they be called by my name' (Genesis 48:8-20). Then he spoke of his death, in their hearing. What a lesson for godly families. What a privilege for the young and the old. To hear

and to give such wonderful spiritual instruction! What an enforcement of the gospel! God gives spiritual experiences to men with this in mind. He has ordained that this is one of the ways he will spread his truth. God blessed Moses with the demonstration of his power so that he might ‘tell his children and grandchildren’ (Exodus 10:2). God made it a principle for his people to follow (Deuteronomy 4:9).

Timothy greatly benefited by such a godly upbringing. His mother and grandmother were godly women (2 Timothy 1:5; Acts 16:1). Timothy was brought to saving faith in Christ early in his life. How was this? He had been graciously taught by God’s Spirit who used the women. He had learned the gospel from them: ‘Continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them and that from childhood you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus’ (2 Timothy 3:14-15).

Of all these it might well be said: ‘Children’s children are a crown to the aged’ (Proverbs 17:6).

Of course, there is a difference between being useful and interfering. The elderly person has a vital role to play, but that role must not be exceeded. The father and the mother still have the parental responsibility. That has not been given to the grandparent. Aged people must not interfere in the marriages of their children. Much harm has been done in that way. Not for nothing did God say: ‘A man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife’ (Genesis 2:24). Nevertheless the principle still stands, the aged Christian must take an honoured and useful place in the family.

Application to an elderly Christian

Do you still regard yourself as part of your family? Do you take an active part in it? Do you pray for your children and grandchildren? Do you tell them of the ways of God, both from his word and from your own personal experience? Do

you speak to them of the great matters of life and death? Do you take pleasure in the children? Does it show? Do they know that you are delighted and thankful to God for them? Or do they get the impression that you regard them as little more than nuisances? Do you interfere and cause trouble between man and wife? Between parents and children? Or do you wait to give advice and counsel when asked?

Application to a Christian of younger years

Do you forget, despise, ignore or mistreat in any other way your parents and grandparents? Do you respect them? Do you want to hear of their experiences with God? Do you listen to them? Do you ask their advice? Do you want to learn all you can from them before they die? Or are they nuisances to you? Have you effectively shut them away? If you have children yourself, do you take them to see their aged relations? Do you want your aged relatives to tell your children about God? Do you bring your aged relations right into the centre of your family life?

We have to acknowledge that there comes a time when the elderly may become like children again. Due to their physical and mental deterioration they need real care. They may need to be waited upon for everything, which can be both trying and embarrassing. They might even become a problem in a way in which they have never been difficult before. It may be necessary to help them by kindly, and even sometimes firmly telling them what they need to do. Tremendous patience and Christian grace may be called for at this stage. However demanding the situation becomes, the elderly Christian must know that he or she is loved for Christ's sake. Your unsung ministry in this service will be known and in due time rewarded by Christ, although few here may know of your labour of love.

The Elderly Christian as a Member of the Church

In recent years there has been, in my opinion, an over-emphasis on the importance of young people in the church. Youth meetings, children's meetings, separate services for children, and so on, have simply mushroomed. Of course the Bible has a great deal to say about children and the gospel. But I assert there has been an over-emphasis upon young people in recent times. I submit that the Bible order has been forgotten and reversed. Little attention has been paid to the biblical teaching on the position of the elderly within the church. I suggest that the biblical emphasis is not so much on children but on older people. The biblical method is to gain the parents and leave them to deal with their children. In this section of the booklet I wish to try to restore the balance somewhat. I wish to examine the place the Bible gives the aged within the church.

(a) The aged still have a place in the church

The elderly Christian might well feel the weakness of the body and be unable to attend services as regularly as in former times. He may not be able to play such an active part in the life of the local church as he once did. But he is still a member of the church. God regards him as such. He has given abundant testimony to the fact. When Joel was sent by God to call the people back to God's ways, he began his message like this: 'Hear this, you elders' (Joel 1:2). The old people were not neglected. In fact they were first in line! When God promised the outpouring of his Holy Spirit, he included 'old men' among those who would receive him (Joel 2:28).

When Moses wanted to take the Israelites into the desert to worship the LORD, he made definite mention of the 'old'. They were to be part of the company (Exodus 10:9). When Paul wanted the church instructed, he did not omit the elderly (1 Timothy 5:1; Titus 2:2-5). The elderly are included in the biblical call to worship (Psalm 148:12). They are to rejoice in the prosperity of the people of God, alongside the young people (Jeremiah 31:13). When God revived his cause, the 'old men' showed their joy by their tears (Ezra 3:12). Haggai addressed them, with the others, upon the subject and called them all to work for the LORD! (Haggai 2:1-5).

God takes knowledge of his aged saints. They are still part of his people. They are part of his public people, his church. They may feel their own weakness and at times they may feel forgotten by men. Indeed, they may well be cast aside and be forgotten by others. But they are never forgotten by God. He still values their worship. They may sometimes feel left out of much of the life of the local church. But they are never left out by God. He regards them as a vital part of his people. He never ignores them. He never leaves them out. There is still a work that Jesus has for his aged saints to do. As in the parable, some are sent to work for the Master at the eleventh hour (Matthew 20:1-16).

Aged Christians are still a part of God's church. They should not be treated as though they were apart from the rest of God's people. Just as young people should not be separated from the rest, nor should the aged. They must all be kept together as one church.

(b) The aged have an honoured place in the church

The Bible does not regard the elderly Christian as merely having a place in the church in his advanced years. The elderly disciple has an honoured place in the church, an important place. There is a biblical connection between age and maturity (Luke 2:52). The aged Christian can look back on a life of experience (Joshua 23:1-2; Psalm 37:25). This is the great advantage that the old Christian has over the young.

With the young the doctrine of the Bible can be, to a certain extent, mere theory. But to the aged Christian it ought to be experience. God placed great value on this matter of experience. Unfortunately, today this value is often forgotten or neglected. The world has largely ignored it in its education methods and it is grievous to see the church copying the world.

The Bible places emphasis on the maturity of the aged Christian as being of immense value to the young. Elihu said: 'I am young in years, and you are very old; that is why I was afraid and dared not declare my opinion to you. I said: "Age should speak; and the multitude of years should teach wisdom"' (Job 32:6). Here we have a younger man showing respect to the maturity and wisdom of experience of an aged spiritual man. See also Job 12:12. Of course, the mere fact of age does not necessarily mean infallibility. There can be such a thing as an old fool (Ecclesiastes 4:13). 'Men of many years are not always wise, neither do the aged always understand justice' (Job 32:9). Nevertheless, the biblical concept is that the elderly Christian is to be honoured for his experience. This is not always done, and in consequence disaster follows. Rehoboam very foolishly rejected the mature advice of the old men in preference to that of the young hotheads (1 Kings 12:6-8). Elderly Christians must pass on their experience to younger Christians, and the young are expected to respect them as their teachers (Titus 2:3-5). It is significant that the highest office in the present-day church, namely that of elder, is known by such a name (Acts 20:17, for example). This speaks of the maturity, wisdom and experience required by such an officer. Of course, it does not mean that every old man is to be an elder in the church. But it does mean that no young, inexperienced man ought to be (1 Timothy 3:6). Thus we can see that the elderly Christian must be given an honoured place within the local church. The aged Christian is a very valuable member of the church. Very valuable indeed.

(c) The aged are still to receive the instruction of the gospel

The elderly Christian is still a part of God's church. Therefore it follows that the elderly Christian must come under the regular instruction of the word of God in the church. This is a twofold matter: (i) The aged Christian still has to be taught the word of God; (ii) The aged Christian still has to be disciplined by the word of God. God does not leave them out. Nor must they 'opt out'.

As we have seen, when Joel preached to the people of his day, he first addressed the old (Joel 1:2). This was not a matter of mere courtesy. The prophet demanded that they pay serious attention to his preaching and that they should act upon it. They, with all the rest of God's people, had to hear the instruction of God's word. Titus had to make sure that the aged received plain instruction on practical godliness (Titus 2:2-3). Yes, instruction right to the end of this life. There are dangers for elderly Christians which can be avoided by attention to the principle. An elderly Christian might think that he has reached the place where he no longer needs any further teaching from the word of God. He has nearly finished his course. He has little influence left within the local church; it is all in the hands of the young people. He has had a long life of experience, and so further instruction is not required. It does not really matter now. He has got beyond it.

All this is wrong. Dreadfully wrong! It is dealt with and demolished by the principle under our examination. The elderly are still very much part of God's church. They must still come under the instruction of his word. Their sanctification is not yet complete. Until their death and entrance into glory, there still remains 'much land to be possessed' (Joshua 13:1). An aged Christian may not have Caleb's physical power, but in a spiritual sense every aged Christian ought to be able to look forward to more spiritual conquests (Joshua 14:6-13). Not only must the elderly Christian come under the teaching of the Bible – the elderly Christian must come under its discipline too: 'Do not rebuke an older man [elder, AV] but exhort him as a father... and

older women as mothers' (1 Timothy 5:1-2). True, the aged Christian must be respected and honoured. He must be treated kindly and gently. But if need be, he has to be disciplined. He must not be allowed to get away with sin, simply because he is old. He must not be allowed to play on his age to indulge himself and impose his whims on the church. The elderly Christian must be treated with respect, but not with fear. There is to be no double standard in church life and discipline – one for the young and another for the aged. All are part of God's church. All must come under its consistent instruction and discipline.

(d) The aged are to be useful members of the church

Not only is the aged Christian to be regarded still as a part of the church, nor just to be dealt with in the course of the regular ministry of the church – the elderly Christian must be an active and useful member of the church. Of course there will be the limitations imposed by the decline of old age. But in spite of that, the elderly Christian must seek to be useful. Aged saints can bring their invaluable maturity and experience into use and benefit all the members.

The aged women too are included and they have their part to play. They are to help in the training of young women. This training concerns the practical outworking of the gospel in the life of the family (Titus 2:3-5).

Thus the elderly Christian has a valuable and useful role to play within the local church. This work will not necessarily be carried out in a public way. (In the case of aged women, that would not be possible, anyway). The nature of the matter to be taught indicates that the teaching might most aptly take place in a private, advisory way. The aged Christian has a life of experience of the practical outworking of the gospel in everyday affairs, and it is this experience that is so valuable to the younger Christian.

But it is not only experience that the aged Christian has to pass on. It is essential that the aged Christian teaches the

truth. That is why the elderly Christian must still come under the instruction of the gospel. Merely to speak of experience is not enough. Experiences of Christians are not always Christian experiences. Experience, even of the old, always must be brought to the touchstone of Scripture. It is fatal for aged Christians to go around advising the younger members of the church, if they are not continually submitting themselves to the regular, consistent teaching and the discipline of the gospel. But if they are, how useful they can be!

Application to an elderly Christian

Do you still regard yourself as a member of your local church? Do you do all you can to keep up attendance. at the services? Do you gladly sit under the sound of the gospel, even when preached by a younger man? Are you still attempting great things for God? Or have you packed your bags and are just sitting back, ready to depart this life? Do you live and speak so as to be worthy of the respect, the honour that God has placed upon you as an aged saint? Are you wiser now than in your youth? Have you learned of God through a life of experience with him? Do you rebel at instruction from the word? Do you resist the discipline of the truth in your life? Are you still pressing on to know Christ? (Philippians 3:12-15; 2 Peter 3:18). Do you seek to be useful? Do you pass on, in the right way, your experiences of the Lord? Do you use the Bible in your advice? Do you try to help the younger members of the church, or do you sit and gossip about them and their mistakes? You cannot do all you would. Do you do all you can? Do you pray for the prosperity of the church? Remember you are an example to younger Christians.

Application to a Christian of younger years

Do you realise that the old people in your local church are still very much part of the church? Do you realise that they are very important members? They may be weak and failing, but God regards them as invaluable. Do you? Do you dismiss

them? Or do you bring them into church life wherever you can? Do you visit them if they are shut in at home or hospital? Do you visit them, not only to give to them but also, perhaps more, to receive? Do you value their practical advice and experience? Do you test what they say by Scripture? (Acts 17:11). Or do you ignore them? Do you think that they are old-fashioned and their ideas out of date? Or do they know the gospel in a practical way, which perhaps you don't? Are you going to benefit from them all you can, while you can? Are you going to live now, in the days of your highest powers, so that when you are old you will have something valuable to pass on to the young?

Application to a church elder

In your capacity as elder do you treat the church as a whole? Or do you split it up and encourage carnal divisions? Do you so preach and discipline the members in such a way that you minimise the generation gap and even eliminate it? Do you look upon this as a shining testimony for the gospel in a world that so often is riddled with division between the age groups? Do you still teach and discipline the aged, in love? Or do you give in to their carnal desires and excuse it on grounds of age? Is all the church under your care pressing on to know more of God? Do you visit the elderly? Do you make them realise how much you value them? Do you seek their advice and counsel? Or do you ignore it and them? Do you allow for their physical weakness and encourage their spiritual strengths?

Last Words

I began this booklet by saying that the Bible speaks to us about old age. It does speak – it speaks to us all. My purpose has been to show its teaching on this matter and I hope I have succeeded, at least to a measure. I hope I have set out some of the dangers associated with old age as well as the glories that ought to go with advanced years. I pray that the biblical warnings will keep us all from sin and failure in this matter. In the same way may the encouragements of the Bible prove to be a source of much blessing to us all. The encouragements of God are real and the blessings of old age can be real in our experience. May God bless all our lives – young and old – so that we may magnify his glorious name in life and death. May ‘we adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things’ (Titus 2:10). We must remember the words of James and apply them to ourselves: ‘Be doers of the word, and not hearers only’ (James 1:22).

Let the Lord Jesus Christ have the last word: ‘If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them’ (John 13:17).